

## **Global Poll Finds that Religion and Culture are Not to Blame for Tensions between Islam and the West**

February 16, 2007

### [Questionnaire/Methodology](#)

The global public believes that tensions between Islam and the West arise from conflicts over political power and interests and not from differences of religion and culture, according to a BBC World Service poll across 27 countries.

While three in ten (29%) believe religious or cultural differences are the cause of tensions, a slight majority (52%) say tensions are due to conflicting interests.

The poll also reveals that most people see the problems arising from intolerant minorities and not the cultures as a whole. While 26 percent believe fundamental differences in cultures are to blame, 58 percent say intolerant minorities are causing the conflict – with most of these (39% of the full sample) saying that the intolerant minorities are on both sides.

The idea that violent conflict is inevitable between Islam and the West is mainly rejected by Muslims, non-Muslims and Westerners alike. While more than a quarter of all respondents (28%) think that violent conflict is inevitable, twice as many (56%) believe that “common ground can be found.”

The survey of over 28,000 respondents across 27 countries was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. GlobeScan coordinated the fieldwork between November 2006 and January 2007.

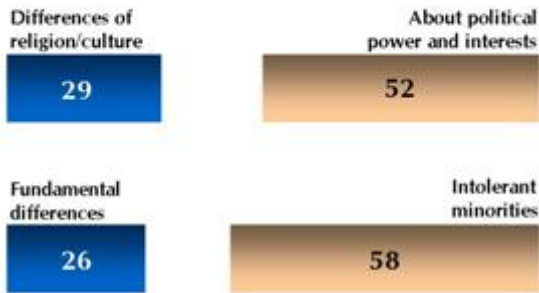
“Most people around the world clearly reject the idea that Islam and the West are caught in an inevitable clash of civilizations,” said Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland.

Doug Miller, president of GlobeScan, added: “Perhaps the strongest finding is that so many people across the world blame intolerant minorities on both sides for the tensions between Islam and the West.”

### **Views in More Detail**

## Cause of Tensions between Islam and the West

Average of 27 Countries

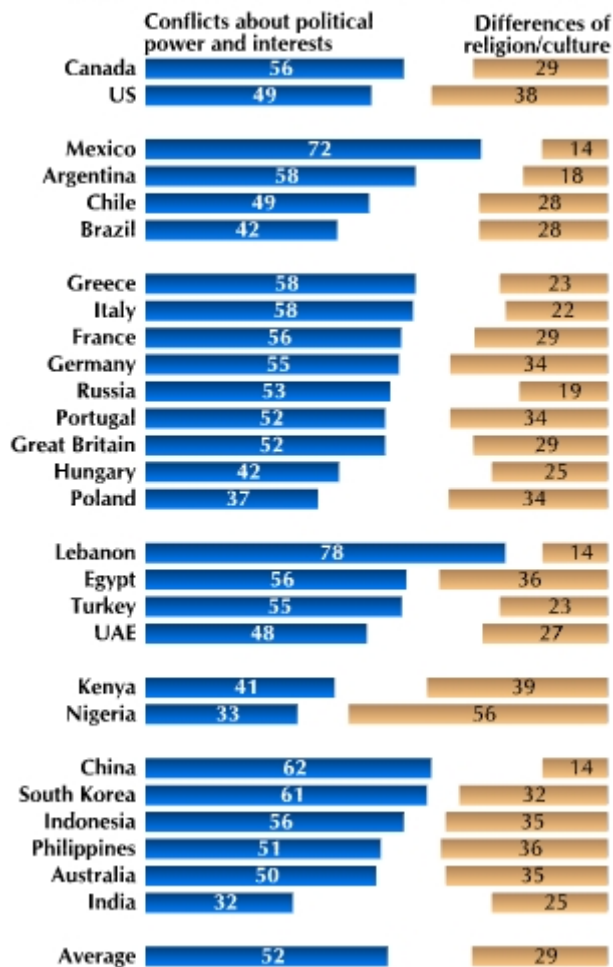


BBC 12/2006

Asked about the source of tensions between Islam and the West, the most common view in 24 of the 27 countries surveyed is that they arise “from conflicts about political power and interests”—endorsed by 52 percent overall. Another three in ten (29%) say that tensions primarily arise from “differences of religion and culture.” This is the dominant view in one country (Nigeria), while two countries have equal numbers taking both points of view (Kenya and Poland).

Respondents were also asked whether tensions arise from fundamental differences between the cultures as a whole or from intolerant minorities. Only 26 percent say they are due to differences in culture, while 58 percent attribute these tensions to intolerant minorities—with 39 percent saying that these intolerant minorities are on both sides, 12 percent saying they are primarily on the Muslim side, and 7 percent saying they are mostly on the Western side. The view that the problem arises from intolerant minorities is found in 24 of the 27 countries surveyed, with two countries (Brazil and the UAE) equally divided between the two points of view and with one in two Nigerians (50%) saying fundamental differences are the cause."

### Views on Cause of Islam-West Tensions



BBC, 12/2006 Asked whether "violent conflict is inevitable"

between Muslim and Western cultures or whether "it is possible to find common ground," an average of 56 percent say that common ground can be found between the two cultures, which is the most common response in 25 countries. On average almost three in ten (28%) think violent conflict is inevitable; Indonesia is the only country where this view predominates, while views are divided in the Philippines.

The belief that it is possible to find common ground between Islam and the West rises with education from 46 percent among those with no formal education to 64 percent among those with post secondary education.

The minority of people who believe that tensions between Islam and the West arise from differences of religion and culture are much more likely to believe that violent conflict is inevitable compared to those who think the problem derives from issues of political power or intolerant minorities.

A belief that violent conflict is inevitable is somewhat more common among Muslims (35 percent) than Christians (27 percent) or others (27 percent). But overall, 52 percent of the 5,000 Muslims surveyed say it is possible to find common ground, including majorities in Lebanon (68%) and Egypt (54%) as well as pluralities in Turkey (49%) and the United Arab Emirates

(47%). Even in religiously divided Nigeria, a large majority of Muslims (63%) believe it is possible to find common ground, while Christians are divided on the question. Only in Indonesia do a slim majority (51%) of Muslims take the view that violent conflict is inevitable.

Countries with the largest majorities believing that Islam and the West can find common ground include Italy (78%), Great Britain (77%), Canada (73%), Mexico (69%) and France (69%). A strong majority of Americans (64%) also think it is possible to find common ground, though about a third (31%) believe violent conflict is inevitable. Pluralities in the Philippines (42%) and India (35%) agree that common ground can be found, despite the former's Muslim insurgency and the latter's history of sectarian strife.

In all but three countries, citizens are more likely to think that tensions between Islam and the West arise from "conflicts about political power and interests" than from "differences of religion and culture". A majority (56%) in Nigeria—a country that has suffered clashes between its Muslim and Christian communities—say that tensions primarily arise from religion and culture, including 51 percent of Christians and 59 percent of Muslims. Kenyans and Poles are divided on the question.

Worldwide, Muslims (55%) are somewhat more certain than Christians (51%) that the problem mostly derives from political conflict. This is a widely held view in Lebanon (78%), Egypt (57%), Indonesia (56%) and Turkey (55%) as well as in the United Arab Emirates (48% vs. 27% cultural differences).

Respondents were asked not only their religious affiliation but also the extent to which their religion plays a strong role in how they approach political and social issues. Results were then analyzed to assess whether the views of people who are more religious (regardless of their affiliation) differ from people who are less so. The analysis shows no consistent pattern. In a few countries, those who are more religious are somewhat more likely to say that conflict is inevitable (Turkey, Hungary), but in more countries such people are slightly more likely to say that it is possible to find common ground (Argentina, Chile, Nigeria, Poland). Those who are more religious are more likely to see the problem arising from culture in France, South Korea, and Turkey, but more likely to attribute it to conflicts of power in Hungary, UAE and the Philippines. So globally, there is no consistent effect.

In total 28,389 citizens in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and the United States were interviewed between 3 November 2006 and 16 January 2007. Polling was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country. In 10 of the 27 countries, the sample was limited to major urban areas. The margin of error per country ranges from +/-2.5 to 4 percent. For more details, please see the [Questionnaire/Methodology](#)